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CIA Finally Shows Its Hand

FRANCIS GARY POWERS got a medal the other day.

You remember Powers. He was the U-2 pilot who was shot down over Soviet Russia in 1960 in an international incident which revealed to all the world that U. S. reconnaissance planes had been photographing Russian nuclear and military installations for quite some time without effective interference from the Soviets.

Powers was tried in Moscow and made a bad impression on those romantics who thought — first, that he should have killed himself rather than be captured; and, second, that he should not have said he was "sincerely sorry that I had anything to do with this," or that he had "done his country a very ill-service" in making flights over the USSR. He admitted that it was a "grave crime."

THIS WAS WIDELY regarded as doing violence to the tradition of such American heroes as Nathan Hale, the Revolutionary spy who was hanged after saying that he "regretted that he had only one life to give for his country."

So when Powers came back to the United States, the feeling was that he had not been as brave as he might have been. Hardly anybody gave him credit for being brave enough to undertake the assignment in the first place.

The anvil chorus on Powers was somewhat shaken when an official inquiry by a special board in 1962 reported that he had "lived up to his obligations as an American."

It was further muted when, at

the conclusion of testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Powers was congratulated by several of its most prominent members.

Now the CIA, for which Powers was working at the time he was shot down, has decorated him in a manner which is no less laudatory because it was done in secret. In fact, the secrecy of the proceeding may be the key to Powers' behavior in Russia.

FOR HE apparently was under instructions to do precisely what he did — not only in disdaining to use the suicidal device found among his effects, but also in adopting a "co-operative attitude" and admitting candidly the nature of his mission.

What secret CIA purpose did this serve? Why did the CIA permit Powers to be pilloried by his own countrymen? Why didn't the cloak-and-dagger organization come to his defense and say that he was acting under orders?

As with so many other incidents in which the CIA has been involved, these questions will remain unanswered. Those who serve this sprawling apparatus of espionage and counter-espionage must expect to take abuse as part of the price of serving.

THE CIA has never made any formal comment on the Powers case and probably never will. But quietly and secretly — almost surreptitiously — it has decorated this much-maligned American flier.

We can take a hint as well as the next fellow.